

## CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Interview with **VIRGINIA FLEMING**Conducted by **GLADYS MACK**

Ginna Fleming was working as a consultant on school desegregation and child health when she was asked to join Marion Barry's Transition Committee in 1978. Before home rule, the District had been governed by a Commissioner with oversight of a collection of unrelated offices in federal departments and various agencies, boards and commissions. Ginna's job was to help Barry and his advisors develop a table of organization that would bring a more functional municipal governance out of this previous informal pattern. In 1979 she became Executive Assistant to the City Administrator. She later held several other positions, including Deputy in the Planning Office, Director of the Mental Health System Reorganization Office and Deputy Director of the Department of Human Services.

Date of interview: May 20, 2015

[Begin Audio No. 1 of 3.]

**GLADYS MACK:** This conversation is being recorded for the oral history of Marion Barry's 1978 campaign. The recording will be publicly available in the George Washington University Gelman Library.

The question for—the interviewee is asked to give her identity.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I am Virginia Fleming, always known as Ginna. And I will spell that: V-i-r-g-i-n-i-a F-l-e-m-i-n-g. And Ginna is spelled G-i-n-n-a. And my telephone number in California is 415-381-8298.

**GLADYS MACK:** Thank you, Ginna. My name is Gladys Mack, and I would like for you to say a little bit about your life before you met Marion Barry—where you were from, your family members, your education, and just a little bit about who you are.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, I grew up in Ohio—born in Cleveland, grew up there, went off to New York after college, where I met my first husband. And we lived in Boston and Chicago and went overseas in the Peace Corps and came back to Washington. So that's how I ended up there. He'd had a position in the Peace Corps administration beginning in 1964. So I lived in Washington then the rest of my adult life until 2001.

So we then divorced, and about 10 years later I married Harold Fleming, who had been the head of the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta, Georgia and had—I don't know exactly when he met Marion Barry, but he certainly—Harold was involved in civil rights all his life, worked with Martin Luther King, worked with SNCC [Student Non-Violent

Coordinating Committee] in the South. And he was asked by a foundation person to come to Washington in 1960 and set up something called the Potomac Institute, because the head of that foundation, Stephen Currier, felt that the central part of the civil rights movement was moving away from the Southern push into the federal implementation and he foresaw that there would be a civil rights act, and so on.

So then, in 1970—'72, I married Harold. And so he was at the Potomac Institute. And I get a lot of work with the Friends Service Committee and other people around civil rights. And I worked for the Southern Education Foundation—school integration matters, that sort of thing. But I was always based in D.C. and I did, in fact, have an office in the basement of the Potomac Institute.

And in the mid-'70s—you would have to check with Jim, but at one point, maybe early '70s, Harold asked Jim Gibson [later a Deputy Mayor for Planning in Marion Barry's first administration] to come to be his deputy at the Potomac Institute. Potomac had a little building—an old building on Dupont Circle, and that's where we all were based in the '70s. And I was aware of, of course, city politics, but I had at that point been working mostly on national policy matters and had always been thinking that I'd love to get more involved in my city but didn't until I had the opportunity offered me by the Barry transition.

So that's kind of the lead-up to your next question, I think, which is how did I get involved in all this?

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly. Well, when did you first meet Marion Barry? How did you become aware of him?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, I did not meet him until after he was elected. Well, I was in public meetings with him. I was a supporter, but I should make clear immediately here that I had nothing to do with the campaign. I was not a campaign worker. I didn't pay any dues. I was not a member of the "Barry Army." I was a Ward 3 observer.

Harold and I lived over in Georgetown, and my major knowledge of it all was through Jim—who, of course, I'm sure will do his own interview—and had worked with Marion in the South, and with PRIDE [a youth training and employment program run by Barry] and the whole thing, and was very close to him. So I felt sort of as if I knew the Mayor-elect, but I never shook his hand, so to speak, until the transition.

**GLADYS MACK:** Well, at the beginning of the transition, how did you end up with such an important role with this new, to-be-formed government?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, first of all, let me say that the perception was of an important role.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I was a scribe. And I will tell you how that happened.

Jim, being close to Barry, had told Harold that he would like to leave the Potomac Institute and go to work for the government, if offered, and he knew he was going to be offered something. And that was fine with Harold.

And when the election was over and Barry was setting up his transition teams, there were a bunch of committees, as there always are, and he asked Jim to chair the—I think it was called the Government Reorganization Team, which was indeed about reorganization. And we can talk a lot about that, but its function also was to create those boxes that would have appointments.

And so, of course, you know, the people that were privy to what the Mayor was thinking about appointments to cabinet-level positions were very—you know, it was a very important position. And so the Mayor's asking Jim to chair that commission, it was a very important move and indicated his confidence in Jim.

And the other thing the Mayor asked Harold was if this committee could please meet at Potomac. And I think, from the Mayor's point of view, it was good to have that rather spotlighted committee out of the spotlight so that people who were coming for interviews and so on—I mean, to have it at Transition Headquarters, where most of the transition work was going on, would have been to be in a fishbowl, and it just suited him down to the ground, I think, to have it off at the Potomac Institute.

And so—well, the issue for Jim was that he had—it was now October—November. The election was in November, right? We started in November. He had a big assignment to finish for Potomac. He was a very busy guy and he was out—I think—again, you'd have to check with him, but I think he may have been working with Richard Hatcher [Mayor of Gary, Indiana] and Gary at that point, and he was spending a lot of time out of town. And he said to the Mayor-elect, "Yes, I will do this if I can have some help, because I want to finish up what I owe the Potomac Institute. So I will be ready in January."

And so, he called me up. I was a consultant at that point, doing a lot of this and that but not overly busy. And he said, "Ginna, if it's all right with the Mayor"—

**GLADYS MACK:** Jim called you up—Jim Gibson.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Jim called me up and said would I do him a favor and staff this committee for him, be the secretary of the committee, do the paperwork, and then be in touch with him by phone. I was his surrogate. I was his substitute.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So, as you see, it was a huge accident that I came into this picture. And I said, "Sure, if it's okay with Barry." And so Jim then said to Barry, "Is it okay if I bring Ginna in?" And at that point he had never met me.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Well, tell me a little bit about when you first met him.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, I am 84 years old, Gladys, and my memory is dim.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** No, during this time.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** During this time, I—

**GLADYS MACK:** When did he learn that you were going to be the primary person of this transition?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, Jim came up and—well, the committee members were Marion Barry, Jim Gibson, Herb Reid [eminent attorney and Barry advisor], and Ivanhoe Donaldson [Campaign Manager for Barry in 1978]. And the idea was to meet on Sunday morning—once a week on Sunday morning at Potomac and for the next 8 or 10 weeks.

And we had a first meeting, and I—my memory is that I met him and the committee all at once. I was produced by Jim and said hello to everybody.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Okay.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And there was a little quizzing of me. And to tell you the truth, I think that the fact that I had not been part of anything was a plus. I had no baggage, no agenda. I was married to Harold. Marion Barry knew Harold by—not well, but certainly—

**GLADYS MACK:** By his work.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I mean, Harold had good standing in the civil rights community. And, you know, so I had that credential.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And I told them that I was relatively free to be a volunteer for these two months. And so they said okay and we settled down to business.

And what is so interesting, Gladys, is how big a job it was to figure out what the D.C. government was: What am I inheriting as Mayor?

**GLADYS MACK:** And what the D.C. government was becoming because—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Becoming.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yes.

**GLADYS MACK:** It was really transforming at that point.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yes. And truth to tell, Walter Washington had not done much. And what one has to remember is that this was a lot of agencies doing municipal functions that were not related to each other that were directly related to the Federal Government.

All the transportation issues in the city were a little office in the federal Department of Transportation. All the employees in the city were federal employees still. After four years of home rule they were still—

**GLADYS MACK:** Being paid by the Federal Government checks.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And being governed by the Department of Labor.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And then there was a range of sort of floating agencies—the Redevelopment Land Agency, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, the this and that. They all had commissions. They all reported to various Congress or the Federal Government in one way or another. Some of them even had sort of White House reporting things. And they were floating all around doing municipal functions. The garbage must have been collected by some Federal Government—I can't remember which.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And the first thing I was—my task was to lay out what existed—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right, right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —so that the committee could decide, you know, what—how to reorganize it, staff it, and so on. And I was told that the liaison to this committee to the transition was Judy Rogers, who had been corporation counsel for Walter Washington.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So I called up Judy Rogers, in my innocence.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** She must have thought—I mean, Judy and I became good friends later, but she must have thought, who is this innocent little—

**GLADYS MACK:** Lady.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —unknowing chickadee?

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And I said, "How do you do? I'm staffing the Mayor's Committee on Reorganization and I'd be grateful for any material you have on how the government is organized." And she paused a bit. And I said, "You know, just a table of organization." She burst out laughing.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** She said, "There is no table of organization."

**GLADYS MACK:** My word.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I have never forgotten that: "There is no table of organization." And I said, "Well, send me what you have."

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I did make a few phone calls to other cities and I did get some other city—you know, but I didn't—I honestly didn't know how to go about researching or preparing anything for them so I just collected whatever there was. And every Sunday morning there was a great, big piece of, you know, blackboard sort of thing and a bunch of papers, and we began filling in—I mean, it literally was a blank slate.

**GLADYS MACK:** You were creating a type of organization.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Creating a city government, yes. And I think people—certainly now but even then—had no idea what a massive, challenging thing that was to—and there were some huge decisions. And I can sort of understand why Walter Washington didn't tackle it, you know.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So, anyway, we began. And my job every week was to take the decisions that were made and put them on a piece of paper so that the next week, you know, we started—we just kept going. And they asked me to—for example, if they were trying to decide who should be head of this agency, they wanted to know who was in the job now and a little bio or—I mean, they knew a lot but they wanted a formal presentation of, now we're considering this—

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —so what of this piece—what exists? And then we would fit it into the developing table of organization.

So a very early decision was that there would be a City Administrator. Now, Walter Washington had had one, Julian Dugas, and—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Incidentally, I guess I might put a parenthesis in here. It's kind of interesting because when I—one of the questions I began to ask people was, "Who was the cabinet for Walter Washington? What did he consider the cabinet?" And apparently Dugas and Walter Washington and Al—the Human Services Director, Al—

**GLADYS MACK:** Oh, I don't remember his last name—Al Russo.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Al Russo—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —and maybe the police chief, and maybe not, just met. I mean, he never called it a cabinet.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** They just, every other day or so, came and had a drink in the Mayor's Office at the end of the day, and that was kind of—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —the way things went before.

Anyhow, one of the early decisions that Barry made was to have a professional outside city administrator. That was, I remember, practically the first week. So the first box was: Mayor, line, box, City Administrator.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** That was the first mark on the page.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And should we check to be sure this [recording equipment] is working?

[Begin Audio No. 2 of 3.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Okay. Talk a little bit more about the Washington administration and the challenge that Barry had as only the second elected Mayor.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah, actually I don't know a lot of the Washington administration, except that he, of course, was very popular in the city. You know, he was the grand old man who had been a very positive presence and important in making the Home Rule Act happen and building confidence and so on.

But I think he, in his first term—as I say, I just don't think he had a lot of interest in remaking the infrastructure of the government. He certainly was interested in making the government run, and did so, but I think he sort of accepted and was used to the federal relationship, in a way, and knew how to make that work.

So when Barry came along, he ran on a change platform. You know: Let's make this more ours and less federal, and let's show that we can be a model city government. And so I think he felt very strongly—he never talked about this particularly in the committee, but it was clear that his intent was to create a very workable, new municipal structure that was much more suited to a municipal government, so that this first step in home rule could eventually be followed by real home rule and a real independent state.

I mean, I think of it as a city state. It is a city, basically. And there was always a question in my mind about whether state government was a model or city government was a model, because we had both functions.



**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And that, of course, was one of the issues. I mean, we had eight weeks to consider what somebody would have taken five years normally to study up on and try to figure out. But every box on the table of organization that was being created had some mixture of both state and city functions.

And, of course, like all elected politicians, there were certain, you know, important people that needed a role. And so a lot of it also was figuring out whose skills would be best in which place. And, you know, there was just a lot going on in the Mayor's mind.

**GLADYS MACK:** Well, let me ask you that once your committee figured out what the structure of that government was going to be, what was the next task of getting the—doing the recruiting and getting the appointments for the administration?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah, well, it flowed right along, kind of both at once, because immediately the four—there was a decision to have four Assistant City Administrators—Budget; Legislative Affairs, because relations to Congress were important; and a Planning Office and an Operations Office.

**GLADYS MACK:** And Finance.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Hmm?

**GLADYS MACK:** And Finance also. There was a Budget Assistant and a Finance Assistant.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Really?

**GLADYS MACK:** Mm-hmm.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** See, you remember more than I do—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —because you had a stake in all that.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly. I was the Budget Assistant. And the Finance Assistant was a person whom we had hired from a city on the East Coast. I don't remember the name of the city, but that was one of—those were the four Assistant City Administrators.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Right.

So anyway, as soon as that structure—I mean, there were still a lot of small agencies to be sorted out, but as soon as that structure was clear and decided on, he began to think about who would be in those jobs. And so he had people in mind for most of them, and the deal was that they would come to the Potomac Institute and have an interview.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And sometimes it was the Mayor, sometimes it was the whole committee. As the jobs got smaller, I did a few.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so people came and were interviewed. And then gradually—I mean, you were selected for the budget job.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And you came and had an interview.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And who was—was it the whole committee or just the Mayor?

**GLADYS MACK:** The Mayor interviewed me. You actually did the—kind of the introductory—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** That's right. I was—

**GLADYS MACK:** —explanation of what—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah.

**GLADYS MACK:** —the new job was going to be.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yes.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** That was my role, was to get through the boring technical part—

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —and then we got down to—

**GLADYS MACK:** And then you recommended me to the Mayor.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah. Well, it was so funny to me because by now of course my name was floating around the Transition Office and the government because it was a very important committee.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And I was sort of the face of it to some number of people. And, as in any political situation where people are jockeying for position and hoping for the best and wanting their rewards—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —you want to know what the gateway to the Mayor is. And so I took on a sort of importance that was really not deserved. I mean, I had no opinion one way or another about most people, and I was a worker bee doing my little task.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But it was about halfway through transition when it dawned on me, this—somebody called up. I cannot tell you who because I really have forgotten a lot of the details, to my sorrow. I wish I had recorded it myself. But somebody called up and invited me to lunch. And I thought, oh—I had the sense to say no—

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —but I thought, oh, I'm in politics now.

**GLADYS MACK:** I have power, right?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I have power, yes. So, I mean, it really—it all was very amusing to me. But I worked hard. I cared about it a lot. I was impressed by the dedication of these people, by their knowledge of the city, by their views.

Now, I should say that there were two other big, big, big issues to be decided during the transition. The Home Rule Act allowed the city to develop its own systems, if it wanted to, in two important areas: personnel system, procurement system. And that was one of the hottest discussions. I remember Ivanhoe, the Mayor just going at it a lot: Should

we do our own personnel system or should we inherit—you know, just take it over and make it ours?

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And the same for the procurement system. And without going into horrible detail, I think it was probably pretty much okay. The personnel system was—they finally decided to accept both as is. And I think because the job of turning everybody from a federal employee into a District employee, if there were going to be a whole new system, well, you can imagine the number of considerations and union considerations and this and that. It would have been an enormous task, and the same for procurement.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And they just decided—and I remember they put it off and put it off because I think in their hearts they would have preferred a local system. And I may say—because very much later on, 10 years later, I had a lot to do with contracting and procurement in the city for human services—I wish they had done a new procurement system—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —because the federal system is totally unsuited, and to this day is unsuited to the District government. It's great for buying airplane parts—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —you know, but it is not great for buying halfway houses, because the Federal Government doesn't buy what cities buy.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right, exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so, anyhow, those were two huge decisions. I mean, I just want to keep stressing how much had to be decided in eight weeks and created from scratch.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right, and I think delaying those—moving those systems—becoming a District system was really important because all of those decisions just couldn't be made at the same time.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** No.

**GLADYS MACK:** The personnel conversion took place almost 10 years later—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Right.

**GLADYS MACK:** —in 1978\*, I believe it was. And the procurement system followed, but there had to be time to develop both of those systems before they could be moved over. \*[If it was 10 years later, that would have been 1988.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Right.

**GLADYS MACK:** So that was a smart decision—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah.

**GLADYS MACK:** —on the part of the committee to do it incrementally, yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, it was inevitable. They just couldn't have done it. But it's too bad, in a way, because if there had been an even—you know, there still is time, but the city needs a different procurement system—maybe some refinement.

Anyway, those were big-deal items. And so gradually people came to be interviewed and a box was created for Ivanhoe, a special assistant to the Mayor, and various other people, smaller agencies.

Well, an example of how things worked was Betsy Reveal, who was—ran the department—the agency which was called Juvenile Justice—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** It was a longer name than that—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —but it was—and she reported to the Attorney General of the Federal Government—I mean to the Court, basically.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly, yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So we had to fit her in somewhere, you know?

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, two decisions: Did she come with the agency? And where did the agency fit?

So that was an example of a small piece of an important little function that related to the Federal Government and had to be fit into a table of organization of the District government. So there were lots of little ones like that, that we were—you know, by December they were gradually getting done. But the big ones—you and Pauline Schneider] had been chosen—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —for the Legislative Office. And the decision then had to be made—was made to keep Judy Rogers as corporation counsel. And her Office of Legal Affairs was created for her.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so, you know, it was a combination of a table of organization and also a place for Barry's important advisers to have a role—a visible, transparent relationship and line of authority, you know—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —lines between the boxes.

**GLADYS MACK:** So after you guys got the boxes all drawn and there were people to fill them, what role did you play, say, during that first year?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, I had no intention of playing a role at all.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Okay.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** For me this was a sort of once-in-a-lifetime experience to witness a governmental phenomenon happening in a city I had come to like very much and cared about. And along about maybe the first week in December, as the committee is breaking up, the Mayor-elect says to me, "So, Ginna, what job do you want?"

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And I said, "Oh, Mr. Mayor, I don't want a job. Thank you very much. I have—you know, my consulting work is fine and I'm happy where I am. And I

happily volunteered and have enjoyed this, but thank you, no." And the next week he says, "So, what job do you want?"

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But I think the Mayor appreciated that I was a hard worker, and he was never one to let anybody get away.

**GLADYS MACK:** And one little anecdote on that point: He always said, "You know, the women work the hardest."

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Oh, he was well aware of that. He was well aware of that. I have examples of that.

But finally—and Harold and I talked about this. And I was not overburdened. I mean, I had clients and I was fine, but I said, "Maybe I should think about doing something." But my problem was that I was then—and I was older than all of them, which was very apparent to me. I often went home and said, "I can't believe how young these people are"—

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** These people are.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —"these people are who are going to run our government."

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But I felt kind of old. And I was pushing 50. And I had had a very checkered career with not many legal—you know, educational—I have a B.A. You know, I don't—I was not a lawyer or anything—

**GLADYS MACK:** Me too.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —a financial wizard or anything else. So I was quite candid with him. And I'm white. I mean, really.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So I said to him, "I'm overqualified for anything you can give me because, you know, I don't want a little job."

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** "That would not interest me. And I'm a human services person but you can't"—I mean, he already had his eye on Audrey—

**GLADYS MACK:** Rowe.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —Rowe. "And you cannot give me a major departmental position. I don't have the credentials for it. I'm the wrong color. And I was not in the "Barry Army" [during the campaign]—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —"so I can't make it a campaign present. So you just cannot give me"—well, as we all know, Marion Barry loves a challenge.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So he said, "How about being Executive Assistant to the City Administrator?" And I said, "That's a question you should be asking the City Administrator." And so he called up Elijah, and the next thing I know—I mean, he took that as an interest.

**GLADYS MACK:** Elijah Rogers was [Barry's first] City Administrator.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, yes, Elijah Rogers was in California and being a city administrator in Oakland.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And, I mean, I thought I had dismissed the idea when I said, "That's a question for the City Administrator," because I assumed that any incoming professional city administrator—

**GLADYS MACK:** Of course.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —would bring his own staff.

**GLADYS MACK:** That's traditional.



**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So I put it out of my mind. And the next thing I know, Elijah Rogers is on the phone to me saying, "How would you like to be my executive assistant?" A man I had never met, never—knew nothing about.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, I knew quite a bit about him because I had helped research him, of course, for the job.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly. Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But I was—you have to understand how much of a surprise all of this was to people at—but anyway, I said, "Surely you're bringing your own." And he said, "No, I'm not. I'm not bringing any staff with me, and the Mayor tells me you're a good, hard worker." And, you know, he went on. I mean, Elijah was not a schmoozer, but he—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** You know, and I said, "Well"—gulp.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So I went home and asked Harold, "Do I really want to do this?" And it was just all too tempting.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I mean, it was a very, very exciting time. I had been saying for some years, "I'm tired of national. I want to do something in my city." And here this opportunity fell into my lap.

So the next thing I know, on opening day we were all down in the District Building. Well, then I began going down to his Council Office and being more a part of sort of planning the physical transfer of all the Transition Office stuff—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —into the District Building. And by that time, Jim [Gibson] had finished up most of his work and he was more on the scene. And he was going to be Assistant City Administrator for Planning.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But then Inauguration Day came and everybody had to move in and sit in an office. Well, you were lucky because—

**GLADYS MACK:** I already had an office.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —you had an office.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so, one of the problems with Elijah was that he had a commitment in Oakland and so he was going to be a month late.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so there I was in the City Administrator's vast office suite with some secretaries who had been hired, I know not how, and Carlene Cheatham.

**GLADYS MACK:** Oh, yes, I remember her well.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Talk about women who did all the work. Carlene—I don't know where I found her. Jim found her, and she became the sort of facilities—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —manageress in the District Building. And she made all the office—you know, when a door had to be opened. And she was so happy to have this job that she made me a lovely little office out of a closet, and—

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Well, talk a little bit about designating offices and allocation of space and things like that for the new—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** The whole first month—well, you see, in any other transition in the world there are department heads and offices that have been there before.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And you take the job, you take the office. The District Building was full of, by now, irrelevant people in irrelevant rooms.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And everybody—and then we had four—well, you were the only existing Assistant City Administrator.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So all these others had to have space created out of somebody else's space. Well, you can imagine how that went. And you can imagine that "my space needs to be as big as your space."

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So here are all these people wanting sincerely to get on with business, needing to hire their own staff and needing to find a position in the table of organization for the staff they had in mind.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And it was chaos. It was chaos. And then, of course, there are the people who didn't get appointment—

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —who were sitting in Ivanhoe's office complaining. And it really was—you know, planning was difficult enough. Implementing was its own brand of nightmare.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely, yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And we struggled and struggled to put it together, and little by little people settled into their space. But I had—and I was in a very awkward position that first month because Elijah wasn't there.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And he was the administrative boss of all this. And the Mayor didn't have time to be bothered with who sat where.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Ivanhoe of course had to be checked with about everything.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, when there were controversies, I knew who to go to—

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —to get the decision made. But I was on the phone twice a day to Elijah. We had morning discussions and evening discussions.

**GLADYS MACK:** Okay.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And meanwhile, I'm getting a stack of mail a mile high addressed to the City Administrator—some business, some wanting things, some this and that. And I'm rerouting it to—you know, figuring out who's supposed to be on top of that.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And the agency heads are out there—you know, Transportation and Labor—everybody is out there having their own problems.

So the period of settling in to the first year was amazing. And then came the snowstorm.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes. Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** We were all very green. I mean, it wasn't just me. I was the greenest of the green, but we were green in managing. And Elijah wasn't there yet and people weren't used to him. And of course a new boss—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —from outside—these people were all old friends. I mean, you didn't necessarily know Jim forever but you quickly made common cause. And, I mean, these were all Barry people.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And here came Elijah, who was a pro from outside. And so he had his own issues of establishing himself. And I think it was a very wise decision on his part not to bring any staff.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** He said, "I'm going into a political organization, and I know my job and I'm going to adjust"—Elijah was very shrewd about a lot of things.

**GLADYS MACK:** Very, very much so, yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And he just settled down. And he had his way of finding out quickly.

And of course there was the old question between him and Ivanhoe, who was really the City Administrator. And Elijah very quickly figured out that, and so did Ivanhoe, and the two of them were actually, from my perspective, were much more in sync than people outside ever appreciated.

**GLADYS MACK:** Oh, that certainly was my experience.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah. Yeah.

**GLADYS MACK:** They worked very, very well together.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yes.

**GLADYS MACK:** And they complemented one another based on their strengths.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Exactly. Exactly.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And they came to appreciate—I mean, Ivanhoe I think was wary at the beginning. And some city administrators would have stepped on his toes pretty often.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Elijah established his territory and his skills and acknowledged Ivanhoe's, and the two of them got along extremely well—

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —and were really very—worked well together. I thought it was very impressive. By that time I was a little smarter—

[Laughter.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —a little more perceptive about things.

**GLADYS MACK:** You had been wising up over this period.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I had been wising—I had been wising up and I watched all these things with great interest.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** You know, who was doing whose job.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So, anyway, it was very, very rewarding for me and I watched all this go into it.

But anyway, the snowstorm—back to the snowstorm.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I think you said a minute ago he blew in with the snow.

**GLADYS MACK:** Elijah blew in with the snow. I remember that clearly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Oh, it was so too bad, because nowadays people won't appreciate that it never snowed in the District, because now it snows.

**GLADYS MACK:** They won't, absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But in 1979, it didn't snow.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely not.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And here we were, a month—it was February something.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yep, early February.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Early February.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And it came down in buckets the day—Elijah had actually been there one day.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Okay, right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And everything in the city came to a halt: the bus lines—

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —the traffic.

**GLADYS MACK:** There must have been 20 inches of snow.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Oh, it was huge.

**GLADYS MACK:** It was just amazing.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** It was huge. And even, you know, Boston would have taken a day to recover.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But of course the District had no snowplows.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right, or a snow budget.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Or snow budget. Well, yes, says the Budget Director.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so I, being a good girl, worker bee—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —walked to the District Building from my house in Georgetown.

**GLADYS MACK:** Wow.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I did. I put on my—I woke up and I tried to call Elijah, whom I had just met—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —and had no idea how he was going to be as a boss. And I got down there, oh, I don't know, close to 9:00 and he was already there. He had called the police chief and gotten himself a car. And he lived up on 16th Street.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I think they'd already moved in.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And 16th Street I guess was relatively—you could get down more or less.

**GLADYS MACK:** As clear as anything. There wasn't anything clear.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** As clear as anything, right.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So he got himself down there. And he and I were almost the only people on the fifth floor—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —or in the whole building as far as I know. And he was on the phone all day long, and I was taking orders and carrying them out. Well, and of course then it was politically not-so hot-so for the Mayor because he made that unfortunate comment to Milton [Coleman, reporter for the *Washington Post*].

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes. Right, right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so here was everybody struggling to come in with a reform and a this and that, and of course it just—it was a big blow for early in the—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But, anyway, we then went on.

And, you know, my personal job got to be more and more looking deeper into the organization of the government. Now, I admit I did small things for Elijah, looking into this problem and that, but mainly I had my table of organization on my desk, and we were going back over the government with a little closer look because many of the departments still didn't make sense.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And there were overlapping functions, and so on and so on. So that whole first term, that was mostly what I did.



**GLADYS MACK:** So how would you sum up that experience, starting with trying to develop the chart of organization and then being a part of its operation the first year? How would you sum that?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Very hard work, very long hours. I have to say that, in retrospect, I think I regretted how I neglected my husband. That was one thing. I mean, I didn't cook dinner for him many nights.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And I'm sure you didn't—

**GLADYS MACK:** Oh, absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —take care of Julius [Mack, Gladys's husband] as you should have either.

**GLADYS MACK:** And three children.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And three children. Well, yeah, my kids were older by then, pretty much gone—

**GLADYS MACK:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —so I didn't have that issue. But I think Harold regretted that I went in, but I never really regretted it.

**GLADYS MACK:** I was going to say, did you find it rewarding?

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Oh, yeah.

**GLADYS MACK:** Do you feel—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Oh, it was—well, I mean, we all regret much of the political thing that happened later.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So that part of it was hard to take—

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —the sort of disappointment that we didn't do a better job.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so it was a combination of excitement and—well, for me, personally, working for Elijah was a plus.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I mean, he became a good friend and supporter as I moved on into other parts of the government. And it led, of course, to working for you and then the mental health system. So that never would have happened, and that was fascinating.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** So it was—a number of jobs in my life I have fallen into by accident.

**GLADYS MACK:** Well, touch on the mental health system for a minute. I know this wasn't part of the transition. It was after the transition but just take a couple of minutes to talk about that. And it's important because of what's happening today with that entire hospital acreage. So talk about that for a minute.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Well, again, it's an issue of the federal relationship to the District—

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —which has always been patriarchal and unhelpful, to say the least.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And underfunded.

**GLADYS MACK:** Yes.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** But in the second term, as you know, I moved over to the Planning Office with you. And to us fell the task that was given to the District by the Federal Government to take St. Elizabeths Hospital—now, St. Elizabeths was the star federal mental health institution that had the huge Fuller Torrey Research Wing. It had an enormous Forensic Division that was full of people who had nothing to do with the District.

**GLADYS MACK:** Right. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And, in fact, it was not a very model hospital in its care, although it had—the children's care was quite good.

But the District had only two little mental health clinics with a little bitty Mental Health Office in our Human Services Department. And we were inheriting a multimillion-dollar enterprise full of federal employees who had zero desire to—

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** —be part of the District.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** They liked being part of NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health]. But it was a very typical example of how the Federal Government treats these—we said, "Don't give it to us." They gave it to us anyway.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** They gave us a deadline. And the Mayor gave you that job and you delegated me to handle the work of—the law called for a planning period and then an implementing period, but the Congress had to pass the preliminary plan and the—they had to pass the first thing and then a preliminary plan and then a final plan.

And again, I may say that the plan that they passed had a bunch of declining federal participation, which they did not honor in the long run. So it was a very typical transition thing. I mean, it was 8 years after the first transition. But you're right; it was a similar enterprise to the whole transition thing and the whole way the Federal Government behaved and, you know, sort of: We don't want to do this anymore. You take it.

**GLADYS MACK:** Exactly. Exactly.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And, by the way, we're not paying for it.

[Laughter.]

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And so, you know, the poor old District government inherited a lot of stuff that no municipal government should ever be asked to do.

**GLADYS MACK:** Absolutely.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** And, yeah, what can I say?

**GLADYS MACK:** Right.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Typical.

**GLADYS MACK:** Well, let me thank you for going back and recollecting that first experience and the formation of the Barry government and the first Barry years, which really kind of, in summary, were stellar years. As it developed there were the issues that tended to cloud some of the real significance of that—first of all, winning the election in the first place—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Exactly.

**GLADYS MACK:** —and then getting the District—building the platform. And actually, I guess we could say that your effort really was building the foundation—

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Yeah.

**GLADYS MACK:** —on which the government was built. And much of that foundation is in place today, so it means that you and your committee did a great job.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** I like to think so.

**GLADYS MACK:** So thank you very much for this. Okay.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Okay, thank you, Gladys.

[Begin Audio No. 3 of 3.]

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Remember that I'm still in touch with that I try to help jog my memories.

**GLADYS MACK:** Well, when Marion passed away, Elijah was trying to contact everybody who had been in the cabinet, and I went on Facebook and found Betsy [Reveal], sent her a Facebook message. She responded, but she didn't give me any contact information, so it just was as if she had not responded.

**VIRGINIA FLEMING:** Tell me the origin of this oral—[audio break].